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ABSTRACT

Andragogy continues to generate discussion and capture the imagination of many adult educators. However, early critics have been joined by an increasing number of educators, researchers, and practitioners who question andragogy's theoretical and practical efficacy. This article reviews the nature of the andragogy debate and advances a revised definition of andragogy aimed at moving adult education from morass to higher conceptual ground. The concept's originator, Malcolm Knowles, has himself added to the confusion with his paradoxical definitions of andragogy and pedagogy and with his assumptions, which lack clarity and solid empirical support. Emerging research results do not appear to support Knowles' conceptualization of andragogy as a theory or proven method. Some adult educators even argue that adult education should simply drop the term "andragogy" from its lexicon. Although adult education could survive without the concept of andragogy, it does possess significant public relations value. Andragogy also has the potential of serving as a unifying framework for adult education if definitional problems can be worked out and if old and new assumptions are rigorously tested before possible incorporation into a larger theory. Redefining andragogy could be as simple as returning to and perhaps broadening its original definition. Andragogy, meaning "adult leader," and previously defined as "the art and science of facilitating adult learning," could be redefined as "the art and science of teaching and facilitating the learning of adults." (Author/MN)

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A WAY OUT OF THE ANDRAGOGY MORASS

by

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ABSTRACT

Andragogy continues to be an important, and quite often controversial, topic in adult education environs. True believers, including many practitoners, apply andragogical principles with fervor while critics challenge everything from andragogy's assumptions to its effectiveness. Indeed, adult education may be viewed as being trapped in an andragogy morass. This article reviews the nature of the andragogy debate and advances a revised definition of andragogy aimed at moving adult education from the morass to higher conceptual ground.

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IS THERE ANY WAY OUT OF THE ANDRAGOGY MORASS?

Andragogy continues to be an important, and quite often controversial, topic in adult education environs. True believers, including many practitioners, apply andragogical principles with fervor while critics challenge everything from andragogy's assumptions to its effectiveness. Indeed, adult education may be viewed as being trapped in an andragogy morass. One might ask if there is any way out of this dilemma?

This article provides a brief overview of the history and assumptions of andragogy, it reviews the literature base detailing the nature of the andragogy debate, and it advances a revised definition of andragogy aimed at moving adult education from the morass to a higher conceptual ground.

History and Assumptions

Andragogy has a most interesting history. Alexander Kapp, a German teacher, coined the term in 1833 to describe the educational philosophy of Plato (Nottingham Andragogy Group, 1983). John Frederick Herbert, a fellow German, disapproved of this usage, hence andragogy vanished from educational sight for nearly a century. The term surfaced again in Europe in 1921 and become extensively used in the 1960s in France, Holland, and Yugoslavia.

While Malcolm Knowles is so associated with andragogy that some persons believe he actually invented the word, most people credit Knowles with introducing the term to the United States in the late 1960s. Knowles' article, "Andragogy Not Pedagogy", published in Adult Leadership in 1968 is generally acknowledged as being his earliest written pronouncements on andragogy. However, Knowles was first introduced to the word in the summer of 1967 by Dusan Savicevic, a Yugoslavian adult educator attending a summer session course (Knowles, 1984). Additionally, Huey Long (1986) believes that Knowles discussed andragogy during a presentation in Georgia in 1967. Whether 1967 or 1968, Knowles certainly generated a whirlwind with both his spoken and written words.

Stephen Brookfield (1984) clarified the American history of andragogy when he recently discovered that Knowles had been preceded by Martha Anderson and Eduard Lindeman. According to Brookfield, Anderson and Lindeman referred to andragogy in a volume titled Education Through Experience (1927a) and in the journal Worker's Education (1927b). David Stewart (1986) then pushed the pages of the history of American andragogy back even further by reporting that Lindeman mentioned andragogy in an "odd" one-paragraph article in Worker's Education in November, 1926.

Lindeman, influenced heavily by colleague John Dewey, also laid the framework for Knowles by emphasizing a commitment to a self-directed, experiential, problem-solving approach to adult

education. However, Lindeman apparently saw no great value in the term andragogy since he did not use it to describe his developing philosophy and theory. In fact, Lindeman may not have referred to andragogy at all after 1927.

Knowles apparently adopted Lindeman's general philosphical and theoretical tenets and buttressed them with additional support from adult education, progressive education, developmental psychology, and humanistic psychology. Moreover, he added what he thought was a new label -- andragogy. Both Lindeman and Knowles must be viewed as having played an important patriarchal role in the evolution of American andragogy. Lindeman might be seen as the spiritual father of andragogy while Knowles could be seen as the putative father who nurtured the andragogical child into young adulthood (Davenport & Davenport, 1985c). Knowles' public relation skills quickly made andragogy a household word in adult education circles.

Knowles' definition of andragogy was developed as a parallel to pedagogy. According to Knowles, pedagogy is derived from the Greek words paid (meaning child) and agogos (meaning leader of); consequently pedagogy literally means "the art and science of teaching children." Knowles then makes a curious semantical leap when he defines andragogy. Aner (meaning man or adult) and agogos (meaning leader of) would seemingly be translated as "the art and science of teaching men or adults." However, Knowles apparently

wants to emphasize the differences between the education of children and adults so he interprets andragogy as the "art and science of helping adults learn."

Some of andragogy's problems may be traced to these faulty definitions. If pedagogy means "child leader" or "leader of children," then andragogy should refer to "adult leader" or "leader of adults."

The emphasis in both cases is on the role of the teacher. Neither definition places emphasis on the role of the learner. Notwithstanding this semantical confusion, Knowles (1970) originally advanced four assumptions which undergirded his theory of andragogy:

1. As a person matures self-concept moves from dependency toward self-direction;
2. Maturity brings an accumulating reservoir of experience that becomes an increasing resource for learning;
3. As the person matures readiness to learn is increasingly oriented toward the person's social roles;
4. As the person matures the orientation toward learning becomes less subject-centered and increasingly problem-centered.

These assumptions, plus Knowles' original assertion that andragogy could be seen as a legitimate theory of adult education, drew considerable criticism from the time they were advanced.

The Andragogy Controversy

Adult education journals such as Adult Education Quarterly and Lifelong Learning became the sparring arena for educators contesting the merits of andragogy (Davenport & Davenport, 1985b). Cyril Houle (1972), Jack London (1973), J. L. Elias (1979) and others questioned andragogy's theoretical status, general utility, and how it differed from progressive education applied to adults. They preferred to stress the oneness or unity in education as opposed to a dichotomous perspective. Knowles (1979) retreated somewhat by viewing andragogy more as an approach or method instead of a theory and by conceptualizing andragogy and pedagogy as a continuum rather than a dichotomy. He also indicated that there were occasions when andragogy could be used with children and pedagogy with adults. However, he still emphasized that andragogy was generally better for adults and pedagogy for children.

Knowles was joined by McKenzie (1977, 1979) who defended andragogy on philosophical grounds. McKenzie argued that the existential differences between children and adults required a strategic differentiation of educational practice. Carlson (1979) also supported Knowles by seeing andragogy as a legitimate theory;

although, he broadened the use of theory to include a political and philosophical dimension. Carlson maintained that politically a democratic society did not have the right to socialize or resocialize adults; therefore education had to be controlled and directed by the learner a la andragogy. He further argued that philosophically adult educators must possess a view of humankind consonant with the emphasis of andragogy -- in other words a democratic, humanistic perspective.

Other authors entered the fray. Lebel (1978) called for a "gerogogy" since older adults differed from younger adults while Yeo (1982) preferred "eldergogy" for the older population. Knudson (1979) opted for "humanagogy" which would include andragogy, eldergogy and gerogogy. Rachal (1983) and Courtenay and Stevenson (1983) called for an end to "gogymania" fearing an educational taxonomy of infantagogy, pedagogy, adolescagogy, andragogy, and gerogogy, or possibly such specialties as Caucasiogogy or Negrogogy.

While most of these articles were relatively brief and argued over small pieces of the andragogy puzzle, the 1980s witnessed more in-depth critical analyses of andragogy. Cross (1981) questioned whether andragogy could be viewed as a unified theory of adult education and described Knowles' claim as "optimistic." Day and Baskett (1982:150) concluded that:

1. Andragogy is not a theory of adult learning, but is an educational ideology rooted in an inquiry-based

> learning and teaching paradigm -- and should be recognized as such. Though Knowles states that adult education must make optimal provision for differences in style, time, place, and pace of learning, the client-centered, problem-solving andragogical model which he presents does not do this. It is not always the most appropriate or the most effective means of educating.

2. The distinction between andragogy and pedagogy is based on an inaccurately conceived notion of pedagogy.

Hartree (1984) essentially took Knowles to task for conceptual sloppiness. She found that Knowles' work presented three basic difficulties for adult educators: a confusion between whether he is presenting a theory of teaching or one of learning; a similar confusion over the relationship which he sees between adult and child learning; and a considerable degree of ambiguity as to whether he is dealing with theory or practice.

Hartree also questioned the soundness of the basic assumptions underlying the theory or practice of andragogy. For example, she states that Knowles does not clarify whether his statements are descriptive or prescriptive. Hartree (1984:206) points out:

> As many adult tutors would recognize, the experience of school has left many adult students with both an expectation of and a "felt need" for dependency and tutor direction (although they may experience the need to be seen as adult by others as a conflicting pressure). The view of the adult learner as self-directing, then, is often more a pious hope than a description of his or her learning. In this assumption, at least, Knowles' model is prescriptive rather than descriptive.

Clardy (1986) agreed with Hartree and further questioned what empirical base supported such a prescriptive theory. Several major studies on andragogical assumptions have failed to provide strong backing. Rosenblum and Darkenwald (1983) found that including learners in the process of course planning, diagnosis, objectives, and designs did not result in meaningful differences in either learning or satisfaction. In fact, their control group actually scored somewhat higher on learning than did the experimental group.

McLoughlin (1971) conducted a similar study and measured students in terms of attitudes and learning. The experimental group scored higher on satisfaction, but again there were no significant differences in learning, and again the control group scored slightly higher on learning.

Conti (1985) found that teaching style can affect student achievement, but that collaborative approaches were no panacea for adults. His research with 29 teachers indicated that teacher-centered (pedagogical) approaches were more effective with GED classes which focused on the short-term task of passing the predefined GED examination, while learner-centered (andragogical) approaches appeared more effective with basic level classes and English as a Second Language classes which were aimed at a long-term process of acquiring skills. Conti concluded that "These findings switch the general argument from a combative stance of

which style is best to a more practical position of when is each style most appropriate."

Goodman (1982) voiced similar sentiments after comparing educational learning styles with leadership styles. Just as the effectiveness of leadership style may be contingent upon environmental characteristics, educational methodology may also be contingent upon external factors. Such an analogy requires that andragogy and pedagogy be viewed as different characteristics of methodologies rather than as opposites.

Elias, (1979:255) another critic of Knowles, concluded:

> Upon careful analysis, then, it is clear that andragogy and pedagogy describe not two distinct arts and sciences of teaching. They rather present two different approaches to the education of children and adults. Dewey called the two approaches the traditional and the progressive. In their extreme forms he rejected both of these approaches in favor of an approach that uses both experience and subject-centered, both present and future-oriented.

Even Knowles conceivably might be seen as in favor of such a perspective. Knowles (1979:53) stated that:

> So I am not saying that pedagogy is for children and andragogy for adults, since some pedagogical assumptions are realistic for children in some situations. And I am certainly not saying that pedagogy is bad and andragogy is good; each is appropriate given the relevant assumptions.

Nevertheless, the central thrust of Knowles' work definitely portrays andragogy as the most appropriate approach for most adults in most learning situations. And of course, Knowles'

definition of andragogy has tended to muddy the educational waters.

A Way Out

Given the semantical problems in Knowles' definition of andragogy, the lack of clarity and specificity in his underlying assumptions, the research results which do not support and sometimes even refute it, and the mounting academic criticism of it as a legitimate theory or approach, one might ask if andragogy retains any utility or viability for the discipline of adult education? Might not adult education be better off if the word dropped back into academic oblivion for another one hundred years?

The author of this article certainly believes that adult education could survive quite nicely without andragogy. There is merit in the position of those who prefer to view all education, whether for children or adults, as a simple, unified process. However, there is also some merit in andragogy if the term could be redefined, conceptually clarified, and empirically based.

Andragogy is definitely a "catchy" word with public relations value for adult education. The word simply begs for a second look. Many people teaching adults in other professions (e.g., nursing, social work) were first exposed to andragogy and through it to the larger field of adult education.

Redefining andragogy could be as simple as returning to and perhaps broadening its original definition. Knowles' definition

is far from perfect and should not be viewed as sacrosanct. In fact, Knowles' inconsistency in defining pedagogy and andragogy is part of the problem which must be corrected.

If the Greek paid (meaning child) and agogos (meaning leader of) is defined literally as "child leader," which is then interpreted as "the art and science of teaching children," then the Greek aner (meaning adult) and agogos (meaning leader of) should be defined as adult leader, which is interpreted as "the art and science of teaching adults." Such definitions are true to their original meanings and avoid the paradox inherent in defining andragogy as the "art of science of helping adults learn" while at the same time claiming that it may be used with children! They also escape the corollary paradox of defining pedagogy as "the art and science of teaching children" yet also conveying that it may be used wth adults!

Another advantage of the literal and original definitions is that they can allow for both teacher-centered and learner-centered activities. Who says that a child leader or adult leader has to be 100 percent directive all of the time? That error in thought stems from Knowles' interpretation. Both a child leader and an adult leader may find occasions to be directive and nondirective, authoritative and facilitative, etc.

Pedagogy, meaning "child leader," and previously defined as the "art and science of teaching children" could just as easily be

defined as the "art and science of teaching and facilitating the learning of children." Concommitantly, andragogy, meaning "adult leader," and previously defined as "the art and science of facilitating adult learning" could be defined as "the art and science of teaching and facilitating the learning of adults." Such definitions would also be consistent with the beliefs and research results of many authors who claim that selection of learning approaches has little to do with age but a lot to do with other variable such as learning style, type of content, goals of instruction-learning, and even gender (Davenport & Davenport, 1985a).

After acknowledging the public relations value of the word andragogy, and after returning to its original definition, the next step would be to organize knowledge and theory in a systematic fashion. Assumptions, including Knowles', would be placed in the form of hypotheses and rigorously tested. Those that survive their trial by empirical fire would become part of the theory of andragogy -- a theory which would have genuine explanatory and predictive powers. Those assumptions which could not be verified would be discarded or reformulated instead of being accepted as gospel by true believers.

For example, Knowles' general assumption concerning the self-directedness of adult learners would probably not survive. Instead, Conti's findings that GED students achieved more from

teacher-centered approaches while ESL students achieved more from collaborative approaches might be a good example of how empirical and theoretical underpinning could be established. Andragogy would be built on fact rather than faith, fad, or fancy.

Such an approach would include the many similarities between child and adult education while providing a place for the discovery of differences. For example, research results on self-directed learning by children would be included under pedagogy; conversely, results on self-directed learning by adults would be included under andragogy.

Both young and old must deal with developmental roles and stages which have implications for education. Implications related to children or adolescents (e.g., establishing autonomy) would fall within the realm of pedagogy while implications related to adults (e.g., child raising) would fall within the realm of andragogy. Additionally, differences related to biological and physiological factors could be placed in their respective categories. For example, education related to children's sexual maturation would belong to pedagogy while education which considers the aging process and its effect upon accuracy and speed would belong to andragogy. Many other examples could be given, but these should suffice for illustrative purposes.

Summary

Andragogy continues to generate discussion and to capture the imagination of many adult educators. However, early critics have been joined by an increasing number of educators, reseachers and practitioners who question its theoretical and practical efficacy. Knowles has perhaps added to the confusion with his paradoxical definitions of andragogy and pedagogy and with his assumptions which lack clarity and solid empirical support. Emerging research results do not appear to support Knowles' conceptualization of andragogy as a theory or proven method. Some adult educators even argue that adult education should simply drop the word from its lexicon.

Adult education could survive without andragogy, but the term does possess significant public relations value. Andragogy also has the potential of serving as a unifying framework for adult education if definitional problems can be worked out, and if old and new assumptions are rigorously tested before possible incorporation into a larger theory. This article has suggested a revised definition of andragogy aimed at eliminating definitional disorder and conceptual confusion while providing a base for the orderly development of empirically-supported theory.

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